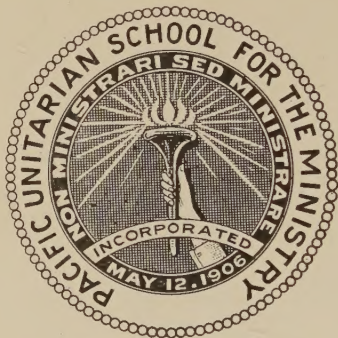


**THE
FORGIVENESS
OF SINS AND THE
LAW OF
RECONCILIATION**

W.J.JUPP

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Forgiveness of sins

Law of perfection

THE
Forgiveness of Sins
AND THE
Law of Reconciliation

BY
W. J. JUPP

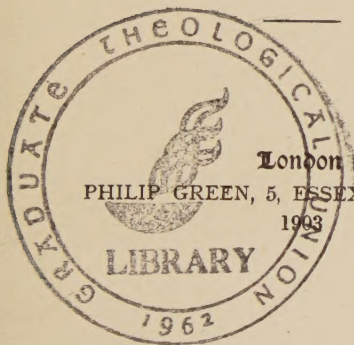
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PREFATORY NOTE.

A DISCOURSE read at one of the meetings of the National Triennial Conference in Liverpool, April, 1903, is here reprinted, with some slight additions and corrections. It was further entitled, 'A Study of Human Experience in the Life of the Spirit.' These words, though omitted now from the title page, may yet serve to suggest both the intent and the limitations of so brief an utterance on so large a theme.

The personal note which prevails in one part of the discourse might well, perhaps, have been changed or subdued for the printed page. It is retained, if with some reluctance, in the hope that the experience there disclosed may avail, however slightly, in the service of others to whom a like inward struggle is appointed. Possibly, by lessening for such the painfulness of a spiritual conflict, there may be granted to one who ventures thus to speak, some lowly part in that *vicarious suffering*, through which, in the fellowship of thought and love, we aid each other and realise together the sacred brotherhood of souls that search for truth, and find it after many days.

W. J. J.

Liverpool, *July*, 1903.

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THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS
AND
THE LAW OF RECONCILIATION.

MAN has suffered much and long by reason of a great gift bestowed upon his race in the far-off, unremembered past. He has suffered because he has not understood the meaning of that gift or realised its large intent. He is beginning now to understand, and his sorrow is turning into joy. That which once made him afraid appears to him as a reason for courage and hope. The old depression of a once 'miserable sinner' yields to the illumination of faith in a possible

6 THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS AND

holiness, of which his own moral nature is the assurance and prophecy. Of this glad release and enlargement of soul it will be the aim of the following pages to speak.

As life advanced upon this planet from lower to higher forms of consciousness there entered into it, far back in the remoteness of time, a strange and new experience. Or it may perhaps be more truly described as an awakening or uprising from within of what before was latent and slumbering there? It was an inward movement, fraught, at first, with trouble and distress—a kind of fearfulness and trembling, as of something wrong or alien to nature and the norm or rule of justly ordered life. Somewhere in the living creature's conscious self a note of discord

sounded, and the harmony of creation seemed disturbed and broken. At what stage of life's long movement of advance this happened we cannot tell. What living creature it was, erect or on all fours, which felt, however lightly, this inward trouble of estrangement first, we may not discover now. No record is kept of that earliest ancestral penitent. We can but say that when this sorrow, as of some alien will, was clearly felt, the life we now call 'human' had begun. The pain of imperfection, the sense of something wrong, suffered in that creature's secret consciousness, marked the stage of sure attainment to the human levels: the higher plane of feeling and of action had been reached. Rising into this strange and new experience, man turned aside or drew

himself wistfully and mournfully away from lowlier forms of life, and entered on that uphill path which, often with so much stress and strain, he is pursuing still.

He must have travelled far along this difficult and toilsome road when, at length, his inward trouble shaped or merged itself into what now we call the 'sense of sin.' That cry which the old dramatist puts on the lips of Job, 'I have sinned ; what shall I do unto thee, O thou watcher of men ?' indicates a great advance, and an exceeding sad remoteness from the rest of creation. I have tried sometimes to think myself back into the experience of one who first uttered himself thus, and to realise the strength of emotion that must have stirred within him. The splendour and isolation of some

noble sorrow seem to gather about his form. Millions of other creatures, sharing life with him there, know nothing of his dark distress. His fellow-beings, less vividly self-conscious—the wild free children of forest, wold and hill—follow the impulse of desire and are not sad. Man is alone with his strange deep inward pain. And still to-day, though tears of penitence and wrestlings of regret have accompanied his life on earth so long, all the other creatures have successfully resisted the contagion of his grief. And one bold and loud-voiced poet of our time has praised them for this, as showing a healthier nature and a stronger self-possession.

I think I could turn and live with the animals,
they are so placid and self-contain'd,
I stand and look at them long and long.

IO THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS AND

They do not sweat and whine about their
condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for
their sins,
They do not make me sick discussing their duty
to God,
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with
the mania of owning things,
Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that
lived thousands of years ago,
Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole
earth.
So they show their relations to me and I accept
them,
They bring me tokens of myself, they evince
them plainly in their possession.
I wonder where they got these tokens,
Did I pass that way huge times ago and negli-
gently drop them ?¹

Ah, no, he did not 'negligently
drop' these 'tokens'; he had found
and kept fresh tokens. This strange
new trouble falling upon man's spirit
was the sign of larger, deeper life

¹ Walt Whitman : ' Song of Myself.'

working within him. His grief for something wrong was but the shadow cast by the shining of some higher right. He thought he was wicked, and seemed to have broken some law of life. But in truth he was even then arousing himself to become morally good. Yes, we may say it now, quite fearlessly, that when man felt that he had sinned, he was a better and nobler being than before he felt thus, or *had any reason* to feel thus. The conviction that he had done wrong meant that already he had begun to do, or was preparing himself to do, some loftier right. His self-condemnation was his 'new birth'; his 'death because of sin,' was his 'resurrection' to a life of righteousness.

Not thus, however, could he read

the new experience then. The trouble of his spirit increased and deepened within him. It created, I suppose, the first religion—the religion of fearfulness and dread. The ways of life grew dark and he moved along them under the frown of some imaginary Being, watching from above in stern displeasure. This Being, so man thought, was offended, and threatened him with penalties. He was afraid and hid himself among the trees of his garden, lest the wrathful One should find and punish him. He offered sacrifices in hope to appease that dreaded Power and win its favour. He sued for mercy, prayed to be forgiven.

Slowly, alas! how slowly, his thought took higher and happier range. The wonder grew and faintly brightened into hope—the hope that perhaps,

after all, the Deity, whose laws he seemed to disobey, was not the pitiless and vengeful power he had surmised. Finding some grace of tenderness in his own heart, he came to think that such might be also in the heart of God. And so, at length, there dawned upon his mind the conception of an over-brooding goodness—the vision of some vast and silent Love which could be just, yet also gracious, to erring human folk. It was feebly apprehended and enjoyed at first. Sacrifices still were offered; myriads of innocent creatures suffered death at the hands of men to express their sense of guilt and win the favour of heaven. And then, at last, the theory was devised of One who had appeared on the earth in the form of man, who did no sin, but lived a just

and holy life ; and this One, moved by love and sympathy for all the rest, had given his life as an atonement for their sins—offered the full and effective sacrifice, which gathered up into itself all other and less perfect forms—expressed and transcended and so abolished them for ever. And henceforth they who believed in him and pleaded his atonement were pardoned—their iniquity and its punishment were cancelled and put for ever away.

Thus, in part, men escaped from the religion of fear into the religion of mediatorial grace, and many rejoiced therein. Yet this was only another stage in the advancing life of the spirit. And already, in our time, a few have passed beyond it and have reached what seems to them a happier, holier air. A faith more bracing, joyous and

free has come to them, presaging thus, it may be, the liberation to which, in the greater fulness of time, the minds of all men shall attain.

I will venture to illustrate this loftier range of religious thought by reference to the experience of one, intimately known to me, who in his own mental history passed through some at least of those stages of faith by which, as I have roughly indicated, the race has advanced, and is advancing still. The real interest of my story lies in the issue of its somewhat grievous struggle—the deep and ineffable joy which greeted the imprisoned one as he emerged from a great spiritual darkness into the light of reconciliation and great peace.

He was born and brought up under the religion of fear. He was told as a

boy that he had sinned against an awful and holy Being—that he deserved, and, unless something happened, would surely receive, the punishment of eternal woe. It was possible, if a certain change took place within him, that he might escape this. But the possibility was somewhat remote, and the gloom of present wickedness and of threatening future misery haunted the years of his boyhood and early youth. The eye of that offended Deity watched him always, taking note of every evil thought and word and deed. Up to the age of eighteen years the darkness of this religion of fear lay upon his spirit. Nor was it his own fate alone that harassed him. He was told in sermons, he heard it from the lips of those who loved him, he read it in the only religious books accessible

to him, that upon nearly all his fellows lay this dread shadow of impending doom and that only a few were ever likely to escape. He found at length some comfort, albeit of a selfish kind, through coming to believe himself one of those favoured few. He thought the Christ had died for him, and he might therefore be forgiven. He sought refuge in the Atonement, and gathered to himself a little quietness of conscience and solacement of heart. But still on all the human world lay the deep, dread night of sin, and above it watched the wrathful Holiness which could, *with difficulty*, be to any gracious and relentful.

And then, one summer night, it happened to this burdened youth that he was walking alone over a wide grassy common, ascending its gentle

slope as the sun went down in the far north-western sky. And there came to him there, he knew not whence or why, a new thought, a fresh vision or conception of life and its overruling Power. Across the wide green earth on which he trod and filling all the space above, far into the softening splendours of that light-filled sky, the presence of a silent brooding love seemed making itself known to him. A strange sweet spirit of kindness and goodwill compassed him about; a tenderness touched him like that which had looked forth in other years from his mother's face and trembled in her voice when it addressed him—like that, but infinitely greater, stronger, more intense. And from that hour religion ceased to be a painful mystery of dread. Love entered into life, and, in

part, dismissed its fear and dispelled its gloom. But only in part. His mind was not yet free nor conscience granted her full right of cheerful confidence and hope. Some of the old theories still clung to him. The trouble of sin could be escaped, it seemed, only by faith in a holy sacrifice which met the just demand of Heaven. Sin must be forgiven by being atoned for and so remitted. And for some reason, dimly apprehended then, his mind could find no sure repose in that belief.

Still, something had been won, some vital truth of experience in religion gained; and with this, the man whose inward struggles I am hinting of in these poor words began to preach to his fellows. For the little he had gained, though crude and cumbered with old dogmas, was very real to

him and pressed for utterance. He entered a Free Church College, and in due course became a recognised minister of religion. But he was never quite at ease or strongly confident. The doctrine of forgiveness still troubled him. It harboured elements that seemed alien to liberty and dissonant with love; and in time he came to doubt whether, after all, it had any real place or significance in the soul's advancing life. 'I'm afraid you are not quite sound,' his good orthodox Professor had said, as he bade farewell to him at the college door, and gave him his theological blessing on going forth to life's untried experience. But being 'sound in the faith' did not appear to him, even then, quite so grave a matter as being true to the faint glimmerings of light that were beginning to shine for

him on other paths of thought. That old, time-honoured theory of 'atone-ment,' by which justice was satisfied through the sacrifice of a holy being for the sins of the unholy, failed him utterly now. He saw that something darkly *unjust* was involved therein. Mercy on such terms was itself devoid of moral truth, and could not, therefore, be a saving grace of life. And yet forgiveness pure and simple, as a condoning or ignoring of actual sin, was hardly to be thought of. A Deity of mere good nature, generously excusing man's misdoing, and granting to the penitent the same recompense of peace which obedience alone should win, could not claim the soul's true reverence or assured trust. And, finally, after long gropings and wrestlings of thought, this doubting

one came upon the gravest doubt of all. He dared to question whether the very idea of 'forgiveness,' as most men conceived it, was not an illusion, because their conception of 'sin' was so largely false. This last doubt rent the spirit's bonds and set the prisoner free ; and passing into a new world of religious insight, he was made to see that it was not pardon for wrong things done but reconciliation with the righteousness yet to be attained that alone could save or satisfy the upward-reaching soul. The Law that formerly appeared to him as some rigid code of rules, which himself and all others had broken, was revealed to him now as a wondrous and most beautiful Ideal of good, towards which, so blindly and through such devious ways, he, and doubtless they also, were aspiring.

Sin was his failure to reach it ; the sense of sin was his own consciousness of failure—and yet, also, it was his inward response to that Ideal's attraction or appeal. The gloom of remorse, as of some awful guilt, lying darkly on the soul, was seen now as the shadow cast by the pure light of holiness falling on his poor, imperfect deeds. The moral Law *could not be broken* ; it was there in its divine integrity of right—God's eternal order of the good and true and fair ; but he had only in part perceived and imperfectly obeyed its wise behest ; calmly, and with infinite patience, it seemed to have been waiting for him to understand, and then to yield himself in joyous reconciliation to its claim. No longer was it needful that another, holier than himself, should suffer to

win the pardon he had no right to ask. No longer was he moved to plead for mercy at the hand of an offended Deity. The All-pure could not be other than gracious towards the imperfect children of men struggling into the light of truth and goodness. Roused by this new vision of wonder and joy, and turning from the past with all its failures, his heart went forth in love towards that shining Ideal of right which now, by its constraining and exacting grace, claimed all the ardour and devotion of his liberated spirit. And he knew that thenceforth life must be one long and slow advancing purpose of good—a movement of unbounded and unconquerable hope ; and in that hope the whole mind and conscience and longing of the man found rest ; and by that hope he, and all who

with him felt the moral impulse, were assuredly redeemed.

What have we to say concerning the issue of an experience such as this? Has it anything more than a personal and individual significance? Will it seem to any either reverent or rational thus gently but firmly to put away beliefs for which men have contended so long, and fearlessly presume on a law of reconciling grace, in things pertaining to the moral and religious life? It has, in truth, some high prophetic sanctions. It must have been, for example, the faith of one, against whom the reproach was urged, 'This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.' The method of Jesus, we may not doubt, was to infuse great cheer into the mind of erring but repentant men and women. Sinning souls were

strangely dear to him, and words of hope came swiftly to his lips. Angels in heaven rejoice, he said, when one repenteth. The father calls on all the household to make merry when the prodigal comes home. 'Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice.' 'Hath no man condemned thee?' 'No man, lord.' 'Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more.' He makes no reference to sacrifice or atonement when men repent. The past is buried; the future beckons, radiant and glorious with its promise of good.

I suppose that to many this attitude of mercy and hope still seems but solemn trifling when they turn from the Gospels to the confessions of Augustine or the groanings of Bunyan or the sermons of Richard Baxter or

John Knox. And yet the highest ethical view of life brings us nearer to Christ than to these. Reason is with the gracious, not with the gruesome treatment of human shortcomings. For if it be true, as science now assures us, that all this strange and troubled history of our race be the result, not of a fall or a disaster, but of a slow uprising from lower to higher planes of life, then the sadness of sin should naturally and promptly merge itself in the joyfulness of good. Not condemnation but encouragement would seem to be the reasonable and just method of deliverance. For such an uprising could not be other than a struggle attended by more or less of failure, in all who felt the strong ambition to advance. 'A spark disturbs our clod.' A moral impulse wakes the new desire,

while yet old habits claim their rights and yield them only inch by inch. The consciousness of failure means the consciousness of larger good still waiting to be won. Nay, it must be the soul's own sure response to the higher claim. In confessing sadly to himself, 'I have sinned, I have transgressed, I have failed to keep the laws of God,' the suffering one is really saying, 'There is a better life than this that I have lived ; there is a good more wise and fair than any I have yet achieved ; I believe in that good and love it and aspire towards it and long to be at one with it, in thought and will and act.'

This surely is the true psychology—the real significance of man's sense of guilt. He could not feel himself sinful did he not also see and love and

long for a goodness that is at once beyond and yet within him. And this, therefore, is what he needs to know and joyfully keep his attention on. It is not well for him to brood in mournful misery over the irrevocable past; it is not wise for him to linger there, wondering and doubting whether its failures are forgiven; neither is it right for him to wish that the natural consequences of what now appears to him wrong should be condoned or escaped. He should wish manfully to accept whatever results pertain to deeds, and even thoughts, that he must henceforth disapprove. How much better he might have done or ought to have done, no one now can tell. He thinks he should have done better than he has—that he could have done *all* that

his Ideal now claims of him is not conceivable. The finite is always the imperfect. 'None is good save one, that is God.' Sin, in the sense of failure to be all that we may hope yet to become, is inevitable ; and what has been done or left undone in the past is, with all its rightful issues, irrevocable. Stay not, then, says the religion of divine courage, stay not pleading for mercy, waiting to be forgiven, wishing to elude what men call 'punishment for sin.' Banish your fears, and cease your penitential moans. Up and follow your ideal of good ; follow the gleam before you ; linger not over the gloom behind. Progress is life's great moral law ; and progress means imperfection. None is good, and none is bad ; it is a question of more or less, in every human life.

Sins are plentiful enough, on every hand, to him who dreams the dream of righteousness. Fallings and failings beset us all ; but it is for ever true, for every living soul, that ' We fall to rise, are baffled to fight better, sleep to wake.' There is a profound truth, if not the whole truth, in the words of Thoreau: 'To say that a thing is wrong is not to say that it ought never to have been, but that now it ought to cease to be.'

Taught, therefore, by the modern view of human development, and sustained by the example and high authority of Jesus, we may venture to trust this happier insight which to some, though few perhaps as yet, has been so freely granted. I would even dare to ask whether we may not now give up, without reserve, the old doc-

trine of forgiveness, and claim for this Gospel of Reconciliation the fullest acceptance and regard? May not the lower conception yield its place to the higher, in absolute surrender? One could almost wish that the very word 'forgiveness' might become merged and lost in the greater word 'reconciliation.' For however we interpret or define, we know that the whole theology of pardon is inevitably associated with the idea of some kind of sacrifice offered to an offended Deity, or else with the idea of escaping the natural consequences of error and transgression. What, then, if there is no *offended* Deity to be appeased, and nothing but folly and cowardice in wishing to elude the issues of a law so sacred as, 'Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap'? But

reconciliation — the assurance that, however I have failed and fallen, and whatever I must endure by reason of that, the goodness which I live and long for still loves and longs for me; that the Divine Spirit of Life, whose laws I have dimly understood and feebly obeyed, is too wise and holy to be alien or wrathful towards its imperfect children—is, in truth, for ever friendly and gracious, sweetly and strongly drawing them into closer union with Itself—that is a conception which frees us at once from all dark thoughts of God, and from the illusion that to evade the natural consequence of ill-doing can bring us any good. Moreover, this conception, stripped of the old crude theories of pardon, once realised and responded to, brings with it a confidence in the exhaustless

34 THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS AND

energy of the good we love, and affords that strength of moral inspiration which for ever saves from defeat and surrender and despair.

And observe how wide is the application of this law—how wondrously it reveals itself in actual life on every hand. If I do but break a limb or wound my flesh, Nature brings into play her healing powers. Set the limb, staunch and cleanse and cover up the wound, and lo! some hitherto latent energies, waiting there as if to be ready for emergencies, come into action and minister with strong restoring grace. How beautiful is that phrase one often hears the doctors use: 'We want to let Nature heal *by first intention.*' And when the opportunity for that is granted her, when harmful influences are kept away—if,

of course, the injury be not a fatal one or too subtle for man's skill, as yet, to find the right conditions—how surely effective is that 'first intention,' oftentimes. And how suggestive is that very word 'intention,' which the man of science applies to Nature. How it carries one's thoughts into mysterious realms of physical action, hinting of gracious secrets there, and wakening within us the faith that a 'law of reconciliation' may pervade the whole universe of life.

And in the moral realm that law is found prevailing more and more, as men rise in intelligence and insight and love. We live in fellowship, we make social existence possible or enduring, only by obedience to it daily. We could not get along together, in any department of human life, were we

not constantly recovering ourselves and maintaining our social relations through the exercise of our own human grace of reconciliation. By reason of our imperfect knowlege, our lack of mutual understanding, our differences of temper and clashings of interest, we are constantly failing in justice, one to another. It is probable that I offend against some of my fellows every day, failing in my duty towards them. But they do not *take offence*; they do not turn away from me and refuse their friendship. And why do they not? Because they forgive, we say. And it is a good word; we know what it means. But it is not the best word. Strictly, we cannot forgive; we cannot condone or annihilate the wrong. The hasty utterance, the cruel silence, the selfish deed, the unjust thought—these cannot be

put away ; they have entered into life and its history ; they are irrevocable. But the generous heart refuses to be alienated by them. The law of reconciliation prevails ; and often, so gracious are many souls, the restoring power comes with such swiftness into play, that the spiritual wound is healed by 'first intention,' and love creates new peace, and kindles in the offending one the hope and the energy for nobler behaviour from that hour. And is your thought of God less beautiful and bold than this that is so true of man ? Doth not man's heart 'show likest God's, when mercy season's justice' ?

We shall be wise then to strive for a more complete deliverance from the idea that there exists a kind of standing controversy between the human and Divine. We may refuse

to believe that God and man are aliens and enemies by nature ; the conception is unworthy of both ; it is a degrading view of life and of the Power by which life is. When Henry Thoreau was dying, a good orthodox neighbour came to talk with him on serious matters. 'Have you made your peace with God ?' enquired the anxious and well-meaning visitor. 'I never quarrelled with Him,' was the answer. It may not be granted to many to possess a conscience so serene and restful as that answer implies. Yet to none should the faith be wanting now that *God has never quarrelled with us.* We must needs believe that the magnanimity of the All-Great is superior to that. No human wrong-doing can alienate the Divine Righteousness or change into an enemy One who 'maketh his

sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth his rain on the just and the unjust.' What a wonderful line is that in the old drama of Euripides, in which Theseus strives to win the hero, Heracles, from his despair because of sin. In a fit of madness, Heracles has slain his own children. He thinks himself accursed for ever. The sight of his face will pollute the sun; to touch him will defile his friend. He is sitting dumb and motionless on the ground, covered with his mantle. His old comrade comes to him, full of sorrow and tenderness, willing to suffer with him, but hopeful to arouse him from that passionate despair.

THESEUS :

'Oh, rise, and bare thy brow, and turn to me
Thine eyes! A brave man faces his own fall
And takes it to him, as God sends withal.'

40 THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS AND

HERACLES :

‘ Theseus, thou seest my children ? ’

THESEUS :

‘ Surely I see

All, and I knew it ere I came to thee.’

HERACLES :

‘ Oh, why hast bared to the sun this head of mine ? ’

THESEUS :

‘ *How can thy human sin stain things divine ?*’¹

It is surely well to believe, if we can, in a divine goodness that remains goodness still, however we come short of its demand. The sun can look on darkest things, and shine but to dismiss their gloom, itself undimmed thereby. The Divine Heart must always love ; and however it afflict, or punish,—if we must still think of suffering born of wrong as punishment,—the grace of its magnanimity can never change or be

¹ *Euripides* : Translated by Gilbert Murray.

withdrawn from the weakest and the worst. Greatness that is also goodness must needs be merciful, and its relation to the finite and the frail is always compassionate, redemptive, strong and tender, bountiful and kind. We do but dishonour God and desecrate the soul's Ideal when we conceive Him as wrathful or vengeful even towards His most erring child. Not to be the Friend of sinners would come near to being the Enemy of saints. Not Paul himself can make the saying, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord,' other than part of an outworn creed which we must put away.

And yet this should in no wise hint of leniency, or any solemn trifling with evil. The great stern laws of right know no relaxing. Justice, however tempered with mercy, remains

justice still. The cleansing fires that burn out sin burn with a steady flame, and no drop of water is allowed, or should be prayed for, to subdue their heat. Only, they are the fires of purgatory, not of hell; an awful and unswerving love glows in them; the purpose of their pain is deliverance, and every sufferer may endure cheered and comforted with hope.

I think the time has come to let this law of reconciliation have larger place in our religious thought and life. The darksome view of moral failure, with its halting sense of possible forgiveness, was doubtless inevitable; and even until now some men must think of human imperfection as incurring the anger of the Deity, as needing oftentimes much wailing of contrition, and even some appeasing sacrifice to win

reluctant mercy and elude the rightful issues of wrong-doing. But the clear insight of Jesus saw it otherwise ; and Paul knew the inspiration of that wiser Gospel when, though counting himself the 'chief of sinners,' he exclaimed, 'We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the at-one-ment—the reconciliation.'

And now the story of man's slowly emerging moral life, as told by science and history, comes in to give us even greater reason for this joy. Through the long process of evolution he has slowly reached the knowledge of his higher destiny. That tasting of the fruit of the 'tree of knowledge of good and evil' was not a mere yielding to temptation. It was the beginning of his moral life. He was not meant to

stay in the paradise of innocence ; and sin but marks the inevitable stage between that and the heaven of holiness to which he aspires.¹ Let him perceive this and shake off his gloom. ‘ Even

¹ This beautiful, if sad, necessity of leaving the happy innocence of Eden for the larger good of human imperfection is presented to us from another point of view in Prof. Raleigh’s noble study of Milton. In the chapter on ‘ Paradise Lost ’ he says : ‘ A short stay in Eden teaches us the sad truth that we are dependent, not only for the pleasures of life, but even for many of the dearest pleasures of imagination, on the “ devices introduced by the necessities of sin.” We cannot settle down to this “ enormous bliss ” ; we wander through the place, open-mouthed with wonder, like country visitors admiring the crown jewels ; and then—we long to be at home.’ ‘ Milton,’ by Walter Raleigh, p. 122. Yet should we also compare with this Mr. Wicksteed’s reference to Anselm’s theory of the fall. See ‘ Studies in Theology,’ by J. E. Carpenter and P. H. Wicksteed, p. 164.

the light that led astray was light from heaven.' His wandering from low levels of unconscious obedience was, in truth, a climbing towards the heights of purposive duty. His sinfulness was the imperfect response of his nature to the stirrings of saintliness, dimly apprehended and half blindly followed. And whenever he discovers his delinquency and is regretful and the sense of guilt troubles him, he should know that nothing but his own ideal of good could move him thus, and he should turn his heart thither—should look up to that ideal, as to the shining face of God, the splendour of heaven itself, whose treasures of great virtue wait for his achievement and possession.

It is true that in this present stage of human effort dark deeds are some-

times wrought and depths of iniquity sometimes reached that seem to banish hope. Even as disease or physical injury may prove too great for Nature's law of healing, so moral wrong may seem to strike so deep that no recovery is possible, and no grace of life's redeeming prove strong enough to save. That is conceivable ; it looks so often. But we do not know ; we cannot measure the strength of recuperative power in the human soul. There may be always a reserve of moral energy that no waste or waywardness of vice can ever exhaust. My faith is that it is so ; but the problem is too profound for human insight here. What we need not doubt is that while the sense of wrong remains the chance of right is ours still. The consciousness of sin must always carry the possibility of

salvation. So long as you can suffer you may hope. When a limb has been frost-bitten and hangs lifeless and painless, the great thing is to bring back feeling, to make the man conscious of suffering there. The first twinge of pain gives assurance that the limb may be saved.

And in the life of the spirit, to be able to grieve for any sin, however vile, is to be within reach of deliverance. And the secret of recovering strength is faith in the law of reconciliation. Believe that the powers of goodness are not alien, but friendly still ; think of them as being on your side, claiming you for all virtue, and the victory is no more doubtful, though the fight be stern and long. Love is there with all its inspiration — not lenient, but exacting ; gracious, but

demanding highest effort. For the 'law of love is not the abrogation of the law of struggle ; it only represents a better way to fight.' It is the way of hope and courage and cheer.

Fear not then to hold, to live by, and to preach, a gospel of Reconciliation. Hold it, not as a mere sentiment of good nature, or a sign of laxity in judgment, or a softening of the moral will, but as a reasonable law belonging to the realm of ordered progressive development. Trust it in all efforts to recover from disaster and defeat, and preach it by word and deed to a struggling world. It is the gospel men need to hear and obey. Amid the strife of classes and sects and nations it should come as a voice from Heaven, and yet also as a message from the inmost heart of man. It

should call us from our broodings over the problem of evil and from our morbid disputes about vice and its penalties, and from our fears as to the future of the race. It should keep our faces towards the ideal and fill our hearts with undying hope for ourselves and for our fellows.

And these Churches of ours, with their large and tolerant faith, free from the old dogmas and the dark creeds of other days—how strong they might become to preach this religion of joy. If the enthusiasm of that evangelist who came over to Europe, nineteen centuries back, crying to men, ‘We pray you in Christ’s stead, Be ye reconciled to God,’ could be ours, with all the larger significance which should now attach to such an exhortation, what strength

of inspiration might possess us. 'Be ye reconciled to God; we also pray you in the name of Christ, and in the name of Humanity, in the name of Reason and of Righteousness, in the name of Law and of Duty and of Wisdom and of Truth—be ye reconciled to God, to Nature, to your own hearts and to one another, since all are striving, however feebly, towards the same great goal of goodness and of love.' Such is the Gospel committed in trust to the Free Churches of to-day. Preach it to men. Preach to them that anger and wrath and revenge, that alienation because of sin, that despising of ourselves and of others because of misdoing, are alike inhuman and undivine. Preach to them that the law of reconciliation is supreme, that penance and moan-

ing and misery because of the past are not required, and will only mar the present and betray the future. Ever before us the paths of progress reach, and the ideals beckon, and the heaven of goodness waits as our inheritance of victory and of joy. 'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.'

Preach it, this law of reconciliation, for it is the hope of the world and the harmony of all confusing and contending things; and he who lives beneath its sway shall know that the heart of the universe and his own heart are at one—that he dwells for ever with God, 'in whose will is our peace.'

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